



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33702

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Steve Branstetter, or Steve.Branstetter@noaa.gov
727/824-5305, FAX 727/824-5308

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 16, 2005
NR05-031

CARIBBEAN COMPREHENSIVE AMENDMENT TO ADDRESS SUSTAINABLE FISHERY ACT REQUIREMENTS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted a comprehensive amendment to its Spiny Lobster, Queen Conch, Reef Fish, and Coral FMPs for review, approval, and implementation by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). See **Contact Information, Dates and Addresses** below for information on how to obtain a copy of this amendment.

The amendment evaluates the benefits and impacts of a number of alternatives to address the following general categories of actions: (1) Defining fishery management units (FMUs) and sub-units; (2) specifying biological reference points and stock status determination criteria; (3) regulating fishing mortality; (4) rebuilding overfished fisheries; (5) reducing bycatch and establishing standardized bycatch reporting requirements; (6) designating essential fish habitat (EFH), and (7) establishing actions to minimize impacts to EFH from fishing.

Fishery Management Units

The amendment proposes to redefine select FMUs found in the Council's various fishery management plans to include only those species found in sufficient numbers in the U.S. EEZ to warrant inclusion in Council FMPs, and retain additional select species in FMUs for data collection only.

Biological Reference Points and Stock Status Criteria

For all FMU sub-units, with the exception of those species that would be included in a data collection only category, the amendment proposes to establish or revise values such as maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum yield, fishing mortality rate and biomass level ratios, minimum stock size threshold, maximum fishing mortality threshold, and it would define limit and target control rules under which to apply these parameters.

Reductions in Fishing Mortality to Meet Rebuilding Strategies

Based on current estimates of the status of some stocks, or the establishment of new stock status criteria proposed in the amendment, several stocks would be considered overfished. The amendment describes management strategies to rebuild those overfished stocks, and to protect other stocks from becoming overfished. To achieve these rebuilding strategies, the Council is proposing several management actions to reduce fishing mortality. These actions include several closed seasons, gear restrictions, and administrative actions to foster the development of consistent regulations in state and federal waters.

Bycatch Reduction and Standardized Bycatch Reporting

The amendment proposes several actions to improve U.S. Caribbean bycatch data collection for fisheries of the region including modifying trip tickets used by the local governments to incorporate bycatch data fields. In addition, management measures are proposed to further reduce bycatch.

Essential Fish Habitat

The amendment describes, identifies, and designates EFH and EFH habitat areas of particular concern (EFH-HAPCs) for managed stocks, and proposes management actions to minimize to the extent practicable adverse effects on such habitat caused by fishing.

Contact Information, Dates, and Addresses

For further information, contact: Dr. Steve Branstetter, phone: 727-824-5305; fax: 727-824-5308; e-mail: steve.branstetter@noaa.gov.

Copies of the Comprehensive Amendment, which includes a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, a Regulatory Impact Review, and an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis are available from the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, 268 Munoz Rivera Avenue, Suite 1108, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00918-2577; telephone: 787-766-5926; fax: 787-766-6239.

You may submit comments by the following methods:

E-mail: 0648-AP51.NOA@noaa.gov.

Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AP51-NOA.

Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:

<http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

Mail: Steve Branstetter, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33701.

Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Steve Branstetter.

Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern time, on August 15, 2005, to be considered by NMFS in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment. All comments received on the amendment will be addressed in the final rule.

NMFS is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NMFS provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to customers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing stewardship to our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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NR05-031